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Wednesday, March 7, 2018



TODAY'S EDITORIAL

Legislators jeopardize pipeline mitigation fund, need to stop meddling

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The following is the opinion of Capitol Broadcasting Company

Gov. Roy Cooper has been rightly cautious to fully embrace the Atlantic Coast Natural Gas Pipeline project. But he has similarly been rightly concerned and insistent that the pipeline developers deliver on their public relations promise that the project will be an economic boon for the area.

The pipeline is mostly intended to bring natural gas to fuel power plants in the eastern part of the state. But the developers say there will be excess supplies that can be tapped for local industries – a potential asset for an area that has faced significant economic development struggles.

The governor and his staff worked with pipeline developers and local pipeline supporters: Durwood Stephenson; former state Commerce, Revenue and Transportation Secretary Norris Tolson; and state Farm Bureau President Larry Wooten. Because of their efforts, the pipeline developers signed a memorandum of understanding. It says the pipeline developers will provide \$57.8 million to establish a fund, administered by the governor's office to support: economic development; infrastructure to assist with agricultural needs; renewable energy expansion; and environmental mitigation, in the pipeline counties.

So far, so good. The governor's office was excited with the success.

But, not so fast.

Within days of announcing the memorandum of understanding, [legislative leaders went on the attack](#). They accused the governor of establishing a "slush fund." Then they suggested it was a "payoff" for approval of a pipeline permit and hinted at violations of federal anti-corruption laws. Next they publicly abused a newly hired member of the governor's office.

In reality they merely embarrassed themselves in their fevered effort to cook up a scandal. They know, but won't admit, the effort was to make sure the people of eastern North Carolina were not neglected.

The fund hasn't been established. The money hasn't been deposited and may not be given if it is not used for the intended purposes. Still these legislative leaders passed a bill that promised this nonexistent money to schools in the pipeline counties.

The controversy is really about the legislature's desperation to manufacture an election-year kerfuffle. It's a 'Hail Mary' to try to make the governor look bad.

The solution to this isn't complicated.

Cooper should go ahead and issue the promised executive order, providing the details of how the \$57.8 million will be distributed and making plain there will be full accountability and transparency so the public knows the funds are spent as intended.

The legislature, when it convenes in May, should immediately repeal the portions of House Bill 90 that deal with the pipeline mitigation funding.

This isn't a scandal. It certainly shouldn't jeopardize important funding that will help eastern North Carolina's economic and environmental future.



Wednesday, March 1, 2018 -- A roundup of opinion, commentary and analysis on: DACA, Democrat voter surge, Russians campaigning in NC, police videos revealed, offshore drilling and more.

POLICY & POLITICS

[Gov. Cooper: Judges got it wrong on elections board ruling](#) (AP news analysis) -- A three-judge panel should strike down in its entirety a law that combines North Carolina state elections and ethics duties into one agency, attorneys for Gov. Roy Cooper said.

[KATIE BENNER & JENNIFER MEDINA Trump Administration Sues California Over Immigration Laws](#) (New York Times analysis) -- The Trump administration escalated what had been a war of words over California's immigration agenda, filing a lawsuit that amounted to a pre-emptive strike against the liberal state's so-called sanctuary laws. ... This is not the first time that the Justice Department has sued a state. During the Obama administration, the department filed a civil rights lawsuit against Georgia for segregating students with disabilities from classrooms and sued North Carolina over a bill to restrict bathroom use for transgender citizens. Mr. Sessions withdrew that lawsuit.

[Police beating video prompts questions, recriminations](#) (AP news analysis) -- A white Asheville police officer shown on video subduing and punching a black man had a history of treating people rudely, according to a city memo that also seeks to address concerns about why the case unfolded slowly outside of public view.

[MARK JURKOWITZ: The open rift within the Dare GOP ranks](#) (Outer Banks

Feb. 28, Ronnie Merrell, a political newcomer and part owner of BK Shuckers, launched a Republican primary challenge to incumbent Dare County Commissioner Rob Ross. Under normal circumstances, it's not so unusual to have a primary fight for a commissioner's seat in Republican-dominated Dare County. But these don't seem like normal times for the Dare GOP. There is now an open, and not particularly civil, rift in the local party that is playing out on a number of fronts, including the 2018 primaries.

[OLIVIA NEELEY: Dems seek voter surge in hope to break GOP's legislative supermajority](#) (Wilson Times analysis) -- Party officials are predicting a "Democratic revival" during the 2018 midterms and general election. And to make that happen, Democrats are organizing like never before and listening to voters' concerns in rural counties, party leaders say.

[Black Americans are more educated than ever. So why do they still lag economically?](#) (Charlotte Observer) -- Blacks are closing education gaps but economic ones with whites persist, a new Economic Policy Institute report shows.

[MICHAEL GEBELEIN: Fate of toll lanes may depend on financial and political costs](#) (Carolina Public Press analysis) -- Interstate 77 toll lanes are being built north of Charlotte but may never open. The outcome may depend on whether political leaders can agree on a way out of a contract the state entered with much public scrutiny.

[DAVID GARDNER: What NC must do to attract more venture capital](#) (WRAL-TV/TechWire column) -- The way to radically improve the flow of big venture capital into NC in the future is to focus on expanding our early stage investment funds and dollars at work here today.

[ANDREW DUNN: What exactly did Russian trolls do in Charlotte, should we care?](#) (Charlotte Agenda column) -- A federal indictment states that a group of Russians created fake accounts to organize an anti-Trump rally in Charlotte. They didn't have a huge impact.

[BILL HAND: A history of local dog fighting investigations](#) (New Bern Sun Journal analysis) -- Here is the story of two dog fighting investigations. The most recent took place in Kinston in October 2017. The second, and larger case, took place in both Pamlico and Jones counties between 2008 and 2011.

[KEITH LARSON: An honor Billy Graham wouldn't want](#) (Charlotte Observer column) -- There's a petition to honor Billy Graham in a new way. It's not what Charlotte's most famous Favorite Son would have wanted.

EDUCATION

[ALEX GRANADOS: Tech experts cautions state schools unprepared for cybersecurity events](#) (EdNC analysis) -- Phil Emer, director of Technology Planning and Policy at the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation, gave lawmakers a sobering look at the cybersecurity landscape during Tuesday's Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee meeting. He briefed lawmakers on the state's efforts to combat cybersecurity threats. He also offered information on how districts and schools can do to better protect

showing most traditional public and charter schools are not ready for a significant cybersecurity event.

[LISA PHILIP: When Kids Come To School With Trauma, These NC Teachers Try And Listen](#) (WUNC-FM analysis) -- One day last fall, teachers sauntered past a wall in W.A. Pattillo Middle School in Tarboro as if they were studying works of art. Really, they were looking at the names of all 265 of their students, each written neatly on an index card.

[Nobody Knows How Many Kids Get Caught With Guns in School. Why?](#) (Pew Trust/N.C. Health News) -- Because of lax reporting by schools and lax oversight by state and federal authorities — and despite federal law — it's nearly impossible to say just how many students get caught taking firearms into public schools each year.

[Meadows introduces bills to secure schools](#) (Hendersonville Times-News analysis) -- Rep. Mark Meadows (R-NC) introduced two bills to provide resources for enhancing school security and keeping students safe. The first, the Protect America's Schools Act, would provide \$1.5 billion in supplemental appropriations to the Community Oriented Policing Services' School Resource Officer program. The second, the Veterans Securing Schools Act, would allow veterans hired by a state or local agency to serve as school resource officers. This bill gives state and local law enforcement agencies greater flexibility in hiring veterans to protect school campuses. These two bills are the direct results of input from sheriffs and law enforcement officers across Western North Carolina, Meadows said.

ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT

[ADAM WAGNER: With drilling comment period closing soon, Regan visits Onslow coast](#) (Kinston Free Press analysis) -- The economic risks of offshore drilling and seismic exploration more than offset the potential awards, the secretary of North Carolina's environmental agency told Onslow County officials. "A danger to our economy is more important or just as important in terms of national security than the few benefits that oil might produce," said Michael Regan, with the Department of Environmental Quality. Regan has been touring coastal communities throughout North Carolina in recent weeks, spreading the message that he, Gov. Roy Cooper and Attorney General Josh Stein are staunchly opposed to the Trump Administration's plan to open the North Carolina coast to offshore drilling in its 2019-2024 plan. North Topsail Beach, Onslow County and Surf City officials were among those to attend the meeting where Regan urged them to weigh in before this round of public comments on the plan ends on Friday.

[NEEL KELLER: MHS students organize forum to raise awareness of offshore drilling](#) (Outer Banks Sentinel analysis) -- In the wake of last week's Rally to Raleigh event with four packed charter buses bringing more than 200 people from the coast to Raleigh for the state's only scheduled Bureau of Ocean Energy Management meeting on the new Trump Administration plan for expanded offshore drilling, Manteo High School students with the Student Environmental Awareness Coalition (SEAC) organized an anti-drilling forum

[JOHN DOWNEY: Tax savings, nuclear trusts turn into multi-million dollar issues in Duke Energy rate case](#) (Charlotte Business Journal analysis) -- Duke Energy Carolinas wants an 11.6% rate hike for its N.C. customers. The state's utility customer advocate, argues that instead regulators should cut rates almost 3%.

[LAURA LESLIE: DEQ official says permit decision separate from pipeline fund](#) (WRAL-TV analysis) -- Gov. Roy Cooper's administration reiterated that a decision to approve a key permit for the Atlantic Coast Pipeline was in no way connected to a \$57.8 million fund the pipeline operators provided.

[The long, frustrating wait for GenX answers](#) (Fayetteville Observer) -- Even as we wait with growing impatience for a better understanding of GenX's effect on our bodies, we doubt anyone wants it in their salad or their pork chops. That's the reason many people who live around the Chemours plant on the Cumberland-Bladen county line have decided against vegetable gardens this year. It's the reason why others are letting their winter collard crop stay unpicked. Lacking hard data, many people who live in the Cape Fear region are drawing conclusions from the scant evidence they have so far: If GenX causes cancer in laboratory animals, it's likely that it will do the same in humans.

[Hog industry lawyers say jury needn't hear other waste methods](#) (AP news analysis) -- Attorneys defending the hog industry against federal lawsuits that claim spraying liquefied animal waste over farm fields has harmed their North Carolina neighbors don't want jurors to hear about alternative methods used to dispose of the waste elsewhere.

[STEPHANIE CARSON: NC Cities Urged to "Plug In" to Electric Cars](#) (Public News Service) -- Sales of electric vehicles are on the rise - up 38 percent in 2016 and another 32 percent last year. A new report by the Environment North Carolina Research and Policy Center and the Frontier Group offered strategies for cities to meet the new demands for charging stations for these vehicles. Drew Ball, state director with Environment North Carolina, said meeting that demand is part of the evolution of cleaner transportation.

[TRISTA TALTON: Group Seeks to Gauge Air Quality Statewide](#) (Coastal Review analysis) -- The group Clean Air Carolina has six web-linked monitors in New Hanover County, providing real-time readings of particulate matter levels in the air, and is working to place them in all 100 N.C. counties.

HEALTH

[Flu danger is not over](#) (Winston-Salem Journal) -- With the calendar flipping to a new month and the worst of the winter weather behind us, it would be tempting to think that flu season is over. That would be a mistake. Influenza has been cutting a deadly trail across North Carolina and is still a danger to avoid.

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